

AMHERST COUNCIL ON AGING MINUTES

January 9th, 2003

Members Present: Sara Wolff, Doris Mundo, Elsie Fetterman, Jean Haggerty, Isaac BenEzra, Henry Peirce, Liz Massey, Barbara Melrose

Absent: Janice Denton

Staff Present: John Clobridge, Nancy Pagano, Barbara Slovin

Other: Doris Holden (Senior Trust Treasurer), Frank Wells (Ann Whalen Tenant, COA Rep. To Public Transportation Committee), Miriam Dayton (Mass. Senior Action Council), Dolly Jolly (Selectboard), Janet Shaw (Stavros), Lara Shepard-Blue (Organizer, SEIU 285 [health care union]) and daughter.

Minutes of December 6th Meeting accepted with two additions. 1) Add Elsie's commendation to Nancy for efficient flu clinic and 2) add Doris Mundo's last name under Wellness Committee notes

Treasurer's Report Doris reports no change, but notes that the interest rate earned on the Edward Jones Money Funds is at a rate of .72% now. Nancy requested \$150 reimbursement for Senior Center Club for scholarships given 11/8-12/6/02. John asked for Trust to pay the most recent the van gas bill of \$29.36. Both requests were VOTED. John will do a solicitation in the February *Senior Spirit*. It was suggested an article about the anti-solicitation phone number program also be included in the next newsletter.

N.C.O.A. Membership: Sara suggested that Nancy Pagano should become a NCOA member so she could get the weekly helpful emails and other materials sent. COA members were also encouraged to enroll. John will look into this.

Prescription Drug Add-On Fee Discussion Isaac presented an overview of the new and troubling fees mandated by the Division of Health Care Finance and Policy across the Commonwealth starting January 1st..

- 1) A \$1.30 Pharmacy Assessment has been added onto each prescription.
- 2) Medicaid clients have had \$1.50 Pharmacy Assessment added onto the \$.50 they have been paying.
- 3) A \$9 a day drug assessment has been assessed all patients in nursing homes who are not Medicaid-eligible.

It seems, "the poorer you are the more you pay." All assessment revenue collected will be credited to the Health Care Security Trust Fund (established by Mass. General Law Chapter 29D) and used to fund Mass Health (i.e., "Medicaid") spending for prescription drugs. The result is that the fee "pits one group against the other" (i.e. non-Medicaid-eligible paying for Medicaid eligible.) Isaac wants our C.O.A. (and ultimately, ALL C.O.A.s) to vote to repeal these assessments.

Jean Haggerty relayed the story of one resident who is trying to decide whether to give up one of her medications so she can manage her food expenses. Jean moved that the C.O.A. vote to repeal these assessments and this motion was APPROVED UNANIMOUSLY. Representatives from Stavros and Mass. Senior Action added their support to the need for this action. Doris Mundo said that there will be a review coming up of how this tax came to be--Frank Wells said the Attorney General is researching this. Isaac reported that Senator Moore has filed legislation to repeal the \$1.30 tax. Frank said there is a letter-writing campaign underway to "bombard" Governor Romney's office with protests to these assessments and everyone should write and share information about personal hardships they are aware of. Isaac asked Dolly Jolly to put this issue on the Selectboard's agenda for discussion. Isaac requested that the C.O.A. send letters to Representative Ellen Story, Senator Stan Rosenberg and Governor Romney stating our stance on this issue. Isaac will take word of the Amherst C.O.A. vote to the Hampshire Council of Governments and he announced word of an upcoming rally around this issue.

Doris Mundo suggested that Senior Center staff speak to clients about options for help with paying prescription costs that can't otherwise be afforded—the Senior Trust stands by ready to help. Sara mentioned that there are programs through pharmaceutical companies for getting prescription drugs at NO cost for low income people who have too much money to qualify for Medicaid or other such programs. People interested in this can apply through the doctor's office. It was suggested to put an article in the *Senior Spirit* about this program.

Isaac reiterated that the real heart of these problems is two-fold: the cost of drugs and the uninsured.

Elsie suggested that it would be a good idea if the January 27th WMACA meeting in South Hadley have this issue put on its agenda.

Staff Reports

John Jennifer Davis-Carey, the new Secretary of Elder Affairs, was the architect of the new anti-solicitation "Do Not Call" program. She has Romney's ear and is very well known for organizational change. There is a concern that the Department of Elder Affairs could disappear due to the state fiscal crisis. John gets 2-3 emails a day on what's going on in Boston. Budget books will be out soon indicating no change in the C.O.A. budget, but there could be changes as time goes on.

Nancy The senior van is getting picked up at College St Motors today after having repairs amounting to \$225. She asks whether the Senior Trust will pay this bill. VOTED (unanimous) to pay. Barbara Melrose feels that "the Town" should pay this bill. John reminded members that when the Town agreed to pay for a portion of the original van purchase, that there was an agreement that the Senior Center would handle the maintenance expenses. Sara mentioned that there should be a meeting to discuss philosophy regarding Senior Trust money expenditures.

Committee Reports

Transportation (Liz Massey reporting) This committee is particularly concerned with budget cuts that would affect the door-to-door service. Presently the group is seeking to find out what the unmet needs are for weekend service and outlying areas. It would be helpful if frail people could be reminded of their appointments and bus schedules could be available in large print format. Committee members will be meeting with John at their next regular meeting (January 21st at 10 AM) to learn more about how decisions on transportation are made and how to most effectively have input.

Doris Mundo said that her husband is involved with a study that will be done to see how funding changes would affect ridership. Frank reported from the Public Transportation Committee that there will be at least a 10% reduction in transportation monies. The P.T.A. is looking at run and wait time and at stops and route changes. It is especially concerned about the "down times" on the Amity Street Shuttle. Barbara Melrose said that some time ago the P.V.T.A. announced that "they are not obliged to do door-to-door service. Janet Shaw from Stavros said that disabled people do not want to be put in the position of being at odds with elders who need transportation.

Grants (Doris Mundo) Doris hasn't met with the group yet. She wants to hear from other members.

Wellness (Sara reporting) This committee hasn't met yet this month. Nurse Cheryl Smith will be coming to the January 15th meeting to brainstorm on getting her clients involved with other Wellness activities offered by the Senior Center. Until the Senior Center is able to establish its own "state-of-the-art" facility, the committee is looking at encouraging and assisting seniors in linking up to go to existing facilities like Kidsports in Hadley.

Facilities (Isaac) The Facilities Committee will follow up on the idea to provide office space for LSSE that would open up more program space at Bangs. It is important not to be in competition for resources. Doris Mundo thinks the C.O.A. shouldn't rule out seeking out building a new Senior Center.

HVES (Elsie) The January meeting was cancelled. Elsie reiterated that there are slots for Medicaid-eligible people to get \$1500 toward care in their own home. Isaac suggested Elsie meet with Barbara Slovin and that an article be written about this for the February *Senior Spirit*. Janet Shaw mentioned that Stavros advocates for Medicaid money to follow elders.

Nursing Center Advisory Committee (Sara) The committee met with Cheryl Smith in December and will be working with her on future endeavors.

Other Elsie encouraged C.O.A. members to look at Stan Rosenberg's web page which is www.stanrosenberg.com.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 10:30 AM. The next meeting will be February 6th at 9 AM.

Respectfully submitted by Nancy Hirsh Pagano